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Monday, August 21, 2017

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and 66 Tribal Nations

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1 — New Research Questions Forecasted Earthquake Slowdown, NPR StateImpact, 8/18/2017

<https://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2017/08/18/new-research-questions-forecasted-earthquake-slowdown/>

A new research paper suggests Oklahoma's earthquake hazard might not taper off as quickly or as significantly as scientists previously predicted.

2 — Proposed earthquake monitoring investment part of 'unprecedented' experiment in Oklahoma, The Oklahoman, 8/18/2017

<http://newsok.com/proposed-earthquake-monitoring-investment-part-of-unprecedented-experiment-in-oklahoma/article/5560694>

In a remote field near Stroud is one of the Oklahoma Geological Survey's approximately 25 permanent seismometers planted three feet deep in dirt — sensitive enough to detect earthquakes around the globe.

3 — Agency weighs views on proposal to meet haze-reduction rule, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 8/21/2017

<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2017/aug/21/agency-weighs-views-on-proposal-to-meet/?f=news-arkansas>

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality finished accepting comments last week on its proposed method of implementing a federal air rule that has been debated by environmental groups and utilities.

4 — Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities, Center for Public Integrity, 8/18/2017

<https://www.publicintegrity.org/2017/08/21/21114/crumbling-pipes-tainted-water-plague-black-communities>

Deep in the winding mass of crumbling back streets in Campti, La., Leroy Hayes sets a glass of water from his faucet in a patch of sunlight on the railing of his porch and watches specks of sediment float to the top.

5 — High Plains vineyard growers at odds with cotton farmers, Houston Chronicle, 8/20/2017

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/article/High-Plains-vineyard-growers-at-odds-with-cotton-11946084.php>

At Lost Draw Vineyards in the High Plains, chemical herbicide that drifted from a cotton field in July has left a patch of merlot grapes ailing, its leaves deformed and the fruit starting to shrivel.

6 — Farmers confused by Monsanto weedkiller's complex instructions, Reuters, 8/21/2017

http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/farmers-confused-by-monsanto-weedkiller-s-complex-instructions/article_8565e99d-c74e-5f8b-8f17-d7312c37329d.html

With Monsanto Co.'s latest flagship weedkiller, dicamba, banned in Arkansas and under review by U.S. regulators over concerns it can drift in the wind, farmers and weed scientists are also complaining that confusing directions on the label make the product hard to use safely.

7 — EDITORIAL: San Antonio staring at ozone violation, San Antonio Express-News, 8/18/17

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/San-Antonio-staring-at-ozone-violation-11943261.php>

San Antonio is the largest city in Texas, and one of the largest in the country, to meet federal ozone standards. But the dirty truth about air quality in San Antonio is that ozone levels, while trending down, have been above federal standards.

8 — Driller interest is tepid in Gulf-wide oil and gas lease sale, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 8/17/17

http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2017/08/driller_interest_is_tepid_in_f.html#incart_river_index

Oil and gas companies offered \$121.1 million in high bids on 90 Gulf of Mexico tracts at a federal lease sale. The sale on Wednesday (Aug. 17) was the first since 1983 to offer every available tract in the Gulf.

9 — Louisiana seeks to expand flood recovery programs for homeowners, Baton Rouge Advocate, 8/18/17

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/politics/article_6ccbb582-8431-11e7-9698-636e746ea0ab.html

As the state works to ramp up its flood recovery programs, some homeowners still seeking assistance a year after the historic floods told a panel tasked with overseeing efforts that they are growing frustrated with the process.

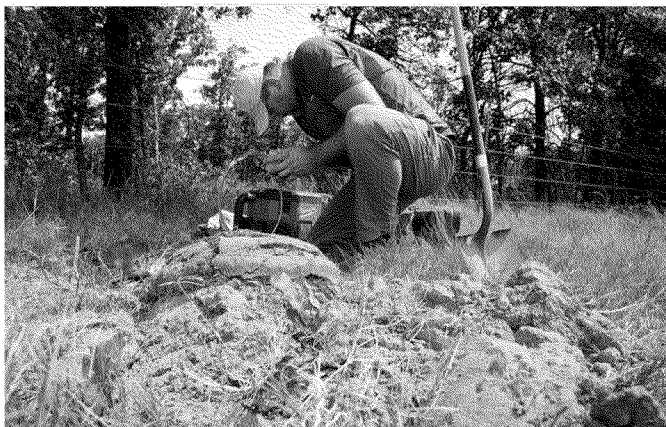
10 — What Happens to Solar Power in an Eclipse? We'll Find Out Monday, The New York Times, 8/17/17

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/18/climate/eclipse-to-test-solar-power-grid.html?mcubz=0>

Unlike most eclipse-watchers in the United States, Eric Schmitt wouldn't mind seeing a few clouds in the sky when the moon starts blotting out the sun on Monday.

Proposed earthquake monitoring investment part of 'unprecedented' experiment in Oklahoma

Tulsa World • Published: August 18, 2017 2:29 PM CDT • Updated: August 18, 2017 2:30 PM CDT



Isaac Woelfel, field technician for the Oklahoma Geological Survey, runs a test on a seismic station near Stroud. A proposal is being made for more seismic stations to be added throughout the state. Taken on Wednesday, Aug. 9, 2017. CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World

STROUD — In a remote field near Stroud is one of the Oklahoma Geological Survey's approximately 25 permanent seismometers planted three feet deep in dirt — sensitive enough to detect earthquakes around the globe.

Notably, the 25 OGS seismic stations comprise only one-fourth of the patchwork network that monitors Oklahoma's unrivaled man-made earthquakes, with the

majority of the equipment in place temporarily and at risk of being uprooted from the state.

So the OGS has put together a \$3.5 million proposal to install 72 permanent seismic stations across the state in a grid pattern to be phased in during a three-year stretch. Another \$400,000 is needed to operate them for five years.

Read the full story from the Tulsa World.



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8/21/2017

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Agency weighs views on proposal to meet haze-reduction rule

By Emily Walkenhorst [twitter](#)

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The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality finished accepting comments last week on its proposed method of implementing a federal air rule that has been debated by environmental groups and utilities.

Two Sierra Club representatives attended a public hearing on the changes Aug. 18, both submitting oral comments to the department in a hearing that lasted about 15 minutes. No one else made oral comments.

"The Natural State is a treasure that must not be taken for granted," Rachel Hendrix, a Sierra Club member, told department officials as she warned of smog, acid rain and health effects of nitrogen oxide emissions.

Hendrix, like others who submitted written comments, called for the department to institute emissions controls at specific power plants, rather than allowing utilities to trade emissions credits among one another.

The department received 10 comments on its proposed method for complying.

Comments in favor of that method came from utilities, a utility group and a utility consumer group, citing the greater ease and flexibility of instituting the state's plan versus the federal one already in effect. Many noted that Arkansas is already meeting the requirements of the first phase of the rule.

The Regional Haze Rule requires Arkansas to take measures to improve visibility at national wilderness areas, typically by reducing nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants. The state submitted a draft plan for nitrogen oxide emissions, which can only be considered for implementation if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency withdraws the current federal plan.

8/21/2017

Agency weighs views on proposal to meet haze-reduction rule

The state will submit a second part to its plan that will address sulfur dioxide emissions — the emissions that led the EPA to call for controls on specific coal plants that utilities said would cost them at least \$1 billion. The EPA estimated a cost of less than \$100 million.

The difference between the state plan and the federal one is that the federal one requires emissions controls on specific power plants, while the state plan allows the utilities in Arkansas to trade emissions allowances and credits during the summer, when air quality tends to be worse. The federal plan uses the EPA's Best Available Retrofit Technology analyses to determine caps for each plant. The state's method would drop those analyses in favor of the EPA's Cross-State Air Pollution Rule, which calls for lower future caps on emissions. The state is already subject to that rule during the summer months.

The Regional Haze Rule concerns visibility only, but some have noted its potential to affect other things.

Glen Hooks, executive director of the Sierra Club's Arkansas chapter, noted that nitrogen oxide contributes to ground-level ozone, which can be hazardous to health.

The Sierra Club, along with Earthjustice and the National Parks Conservation Association, opposes the state's plan because it allows a utility to keep emissions the same at certain Arkansas power plants while instead reducing emissions elsewhere.

"Why should Arkansans have to suffer the effects of pollution to our bodies, our air and our parks while a utility gets to focus its cleanup efforts elsewhere?" Hooks said.

The U.S. Forest Service additionally raised concerns that the state's plan was insufficient, including by not factoring in Missouri's wilderness areas. The service suggested instituting year-round nitrogen oxide limits, rather than addressing them only during the ozone season, which runs from May until Sept.

Other groups, including utilities, have favored the state's plan.

"The Proposed Revisions, if finalized, would provide compliance flexibility and reduce the significant regulatory burden on the electricity sector, while still ensuring that visibility is as good as or better than it would be if source-specific nitrogen oxide emission limits were required," Entergy attorney Kelly McQueen wrote in the company's comments.

Chad Wood, an attorney for the Energy and Environmental Alliance of Arkansas utility group, echoed McQueen.

"Forcing sources that already must comply with the ozone-season nitrogen oxide trading program under the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule to invest in costly retrofit technology and reasonable progress controls is duplicative and unduly burdensome, and ultimately unnecessary to achieve visibility improvements," Wood wrote.

Center for Public Integrity

Published on *Center for Public Integrity* (<https://www.publicintegrity.org>)

[Home](#) > Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities ^[1]

By [William Taylor Potter](#) ^[2], [Brandon Kitchin](#) ^[3] and [Alexis Reese](#) ^[4]

7 hours, 27 minutes ago

CAMPTI, La. – Deep in the winding mass of crumbling back streets in Campti, Leroy Hayes sets a glass of water from his faucet in a patch of sunlight on the railing of his porch and watches specks of sediment float to the top.

Hayes said the town's water system has been bad for years, with water often coming out brown and smelling like bleach. The family uses bottled water for drinking and cooking and often has to drive to the city of Natchitoches, 11 miles away, to wash their clothes. The Campti water leaves their clothes with a yellowish tint.

"Don't nobody drink that mess," Hayes said.

Like many poor African-American communities, Campti's poverty is a significant impediment to making crucial improvements to the town's infrastructure – including its old water system. Hayes is a lifelong resident of the town, where according to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than half of the predominantly African-American population lives in poverty. Campti's median household income is only \$15,428.

Skepticism about drinking water is pervasive in many black communities, most recently in the urban cities like Milwaukee, where high childhood lead poisoning rates plague the city, and Flint, Michigan, where lead from pipes leached into the city's water. But it also affects the pockets of poverty in states such as Louisiana, Alabama, North Carolina and Texas, where many residents rely on antiquated water systems and haphazard monitoring or live near businesses and industries whose waste, they say, pollutes their water systems.

"Everything that happens now where people don't want it, it goes into a poor and black neighborhood," said Esther Calhoun, president of Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health and Justice.

A News21 national analysis of water violations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that tens of millions of Americans are drinking contaminated water – particularly in small, low-income and minority communities. Aging infrastructure and limited funding are two of the major water issues posing a threat to public health, according to the agency's 2016 Drinking Water Action Plan.

"For someone to say that there's not a correlation to me means they have their eyes closed, or they don't want to believe that these impacts are actually happening or don't want to dedicate the resources to these communities," said Mustafa Ali, the former assistant associate administrator for environmental justice at the EPA.

In Uniontown, Alabama, black residents blame a swell of gastrointestinal complications on the waste from a nearby catfish farm they say pollutes their drinking water. In parts of North Carolina,

8/21/2017

Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

impoverished African-Americans sometimes rely on contaminated wells for drinking water – though public water systems run just a few feet from their homes.

“The probability of drinking water violations is significantly greater in communities that are both poor and nonwhite,” said Manuel Teodoro, a Texas A&M University professor and the co-author of “Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Justice in Safe Water Compliance,” a 2017 study of violations across the country. “What’s troubling from an environmental justice perspective is that race and ethnicity matter most when people are poor.”

The water system in Campti is more than 50 years old, according to an audit from the Louisiana legislative auditor. Near the end of 2016, the water tank sprang several holes, some of which were temporarily plugged with sticks. A new tank was built in March, but residents still don’t trust that the water is safe.

Annette Caskey lives in one of the poorest areas of Campti – a small community called Sherry Circle. Broken pavement leads to a small hill, where worn dirt paths climb to small trailer-like houses. Caskey’s tap water is often orange or brown. Rather than drink it, she buys water by the caseload at the local Brookshire’s or M&M Grocery. Her dogs also get bottled water.

“This water sucks,” Caskey said. “Sometimes it’s got too much chlorine in it, and sometimes it’s got no chlorine at all. It’s like you’re drinking sewage.” For a long time, residents were getting sick with diarrhea and other issues, Caskey said. She said it stopped for a while, but people have started getting sick again.

Campti is the oldest settlement along the Red River, whose waters snake from northwest Texas down to the Atchafalaya River in Louisiana. Worn-down roads lead to the town’s meager collection of businesses, which include a Dollar General, a Papa John’s and a couple of gas stations – the Campti Quick Stop and an All-N-1.

Judy Daniels, Campti’s mayor from 2006-2010, said most of the town’s water infrastructure is anywhere from 40 to 60 years old, and the town doesn’t have money to fix it. She said the water does have problems, and they get worse after a storm or power outage because the water pump does not have a backup generator.

“The funds just aren’t there for us,” Daniels said. “We’re the stepchildren.”

Campti’s water system has had seven health-based violations. Six of those came in the 1990s, when tests showed the presence of coliform bacteria – a sign that feces or sewage could be contaminating the water. The only health-based violation this decade was in 2014, when Campti’s system received a treatment violation, meaning there was a deficiency that was not properly treated.

“It’s been like this ever since I’ve been here, and I grew up here,” Caskey said.

There have been no other recent health violations. But then, testing the water for the last five years has been up to the local utilities that manage the water. Budget cuts in 2012 forced the Louisiana Office of Public Health to lay off the state’s sanitarians, the people responsible for taking water samples. According to an audit by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor, during that time – from 2012 until January 2017 – the state could not be sure the results were accurate.

The town of Tallulah, 150 miles east of Campti, has had 11 health-based violations dating to 1991. In 2015, coliform was found in the system.

8/21/2017

Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

Much of Tallulah was born from the 1,440-acre Scotland Plantation, where an old mansion still stands, the only remnant of the former village of Richmond, which was destroyed during Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Today, Tallulah's median household income is \$23,317, about half of the state's average. About 40 percent of the population – which is 77 percent black – lives in poverty, including 60 percent of its children.

Decorian Herring lives with his two daughters in one of the most impoverished parts of Tallulah, a sparsely populated complex named Magnolia Villas. The neighborhood often floods during storms, and, more than once, he's seen alligators swimming between the rows of apartments.

The tap water is usually discolored and has a strong odor, Herring said. But it gets worse after a storm floods the complex.

"Sometimes you'll run the water in the tub ... and you'll see the water come out green or brown," Herring said. "A lot of times we'll get the letter around here that they're going to be shutting the water off for a couple of hours because of the contamination."

The water started getting worse about a year ago, Herring said. People in the complex started getting sick with stomach viruses, and they stopped drinking the water. He said he's constantly buying cases of bottled water for his family.

"You never really know when the boil advisory is," Herring said. "The majority of the time it comes late in the mail. They'll have already started it."

The Rev. Tommy Watson, pastor of East Star Baptist Church and one of Tallulah's aldermen, said the town has been "repairing and patching" the system for the last several years. The town had four or five boil advisories in 2016, which is more than normal, Watson said. Two of those came when a water main broke.

Tallulah Mayor Paxton Branch said the town plans to replace its system. The current system is so old that companies don't make the parts necessary for some repairs. Right now, the city has about \$6 million of the \$10 million needed to begin construction.

For some residents, the new system can't come fast enough. Hours after the mayor explained his plan for a new system, a water main broke, leaving large swaths of the town without water.

Pamela Oliver says she doesn't trust the water enough to use it for anything but cooking and cleaning.

Louisiana only recognizes the lowest level of EPA standards and does not regularly test for secondary issues, such as color and odor, the most common complaints in towns like Campti and Tallulah.

"The problem with Louisiana is that we only recognize the lowest EPA ratings for our water, which means our water is safe," said Lady Carlson of Together Louisiana, a statewide advocacy group. "So the water in St. Joseph, they said was safe. It looks like gumbo, but you can drink it. In six months, we had the problem fixed."

Louisiana's St. Joseph is the site of the state's most-publicized water system failure. After pipes in the town's decrepit water system began to corrode, lead and copper leached into the system.

"When you look at the areas with crumbling infrastructure, it's in communities of color and low-income communities," said Ali, the former EPA official.

8/21/2017

Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

In his post with the EPA, Ali oversaw the office tasked with advocating for populations inordinately affected by environmental issues – low-income communities, African-Americans, Latinos and Native American tribes. Ali resigned over disagreements with President Donald Trump’s administration.

The Environmental Justice Office is one of several EPA departments that face elimination under the president’s proposed budget.

Yet, across the country, Americans of color are growing more concerned about their drinking water, according to a 2017 Gallup poll. Up from 73 percent in 2015, 80 percent of nonwhite respondents now worry “a great deal” about their water.

“If we don’t help our most vulnerable communities to not only be healthier but to be more economically viable, then we leave a gap in our country, and it weakens us,” Ali said.

In Melville, about an hour northwest of Baton Rouge in southern Louisiana, the town’s water system is served by a single 54-year-old well. One of the country’s poorest communities, it has just over 1,000 residents and a median household income of \$17,670.

The self-proclaimed “Catfish Capital of the World” sits on the banks of the Atchafalaya River – one of the state’s most iconic and beloved geographic features. But the town has no second well or backup plan. If the well goes down, the state of Louisiana will have to send trucks of water to keep the town from drying out.

Its system also has been poorly maintained and doesn’t have enough money to pay for upgrades, said Mayor Erana Mayes. In 2013, the water system was \$125,541 in the red, and in 2014, \$62,971 in utility payments went missing. Leaks regularly spring in the underground pipes. But when one leak is clamped, another pops up down the line.

“We’re constantly using chlorine. That’s a daily thing,” Mayes said. “Our water is good, now. Nothing is wrong with it. It’s just the expense of it.”

Carlson said most of the problems in rural towns – like Tallulah and Melville – come from outdated water systems and aging pipes. But there’s little money to make repairs, much less replace the pipes.

“There’s just been a lack of attention to these neighborhoods and a lack of political will to get things done,” said Carlson.

In southern Alabama’s Uniontown, a community first established around a slave plantation, water quality is a persistent worry for the mostly black residents, who say a nearby catfish farm contaminates their town water system.

“Everybody knows about the smell and water in Uniontown. It’s bad,” said Demetrius Holmes, who says he’s been in and out of the hospital 20 times because of gastrointestinal complications. “They just say gastroparesis, or acid reflux. I’ve heard them all. But no one can figure out what’s wrong with my intestines.”

He says it’s the water.

“You have 2,000 to 2,200 people that live here in Uniontown and just about all of us have problems, and a lot of us have the same problems,” said Ben Eaton, vice president of the Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health and Justice. “But as far as good water, I can’t say it’s good. Too many issues around it to just say.”

8/21/2017

Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

Mark Elliott, a civil engineer and researcher at the University of Alabama, claims a nearby catfish farm plays a part. "They have been disposing their industrial wastewater to the Uniontown system."

"The system was not designed to take that load. Basically, ... their wastewater volume is equivalent to the whole town put together," he said. "So their system ended up being underdesigned. It's bursting the side of the lagoon and running off into the stream constantly."

In another community in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, residents relied for years on contaminated well water – even though most everyone around received water from a public system. "The well water was bad," said Robert Campbell, a pastor in the community. "Now, we can basically say what is in there. Fecal matter, benzene, arsenic ... but it wasn't safe to drink."

This year, the community was hooked up to public water and sewer services.

"We didn't have the basic amenities, like clean water and sewer," Campbell said. "There were a lot of things we were looking at, saying, why isn't it in another community that looks almost like us except for the ethnicity of the community?"

In Sandbranch, Texas, residents don't have a public drinking water system at all. Just 14 miles from downtown Dallas, residents used to rely on private wells supplied by groundwater but don't anymore. Most drink bottled water delivered by the local church each week.

"It would be a miracle if we could ever turn our tap on and get running water," said 83-year-old Ivory Hall Jr., who makes a 20-mile round trip to the city of Ferris to fill a water tank and hauls it home.

Leroy Thomas has lived in Sandbranch for 40 years and says the water used to be drinkable. He claims the groundwater was contaminated by illegal dumping and more recently, a nearby wastewater treatment.

"The runoff, the illegal dumping, the tires ... all of the waste that people bring in here, it's going in the ground," he said.

News21 requested water testing records for Sandbranch. But an email from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said, "After reviewing the appropriate resources of the TCEQ, we were unable to locate any responsive information in the possession of the TCEQ."

Most of the community's 100 or fewer residents live in ramshackle houses they can't sell because they wouldn't make enough money to move.

"This is America and in the 21st century, people living in the shadows of the most prosperous urban area as far as job creation for the last five years deserve water," said Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins, who presides over the Dallas County Commissioners Court. "We got families that can stand on a hill and can look at downtown Dallas and don't have running drinking water. That's what we're trying to fix."

A 2016 report to President Barack Obama outlined several problems affecting water quality across the nation, including aging systems and lead service lines. According to the report, called "Science and Technology to Ensure the Safety of the Nation's Drinking Water," lead pipes have become a common problem in old cities and the Midwest. The American Water Works Association estimates 6.1 million lead service lines remain in the U.S. and serve 15 million to 22 million people.

"You hear time and time again this issue with aging infrastructure, and you have the lead pipes being part of the issue," said Jacqueline Patterson, the director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate

8/21/2017

Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

Justice Program. “You have this recipe for disaster like what we found in Flint.”

In Milwaukee, about 70,000 homes are connected to the city’s water system with aging lead pipes, many of which run under low-income and African-American communities in the city’s northside neighborhoods. These lead pipes – along with the 130,000 homes with lead-based paint – contribute to the high numbers of poisoned children, according to the 2014 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin.

One of them is Troy Lowe, a 4-year-old infatuated with dandelions, which he picks for his bus driver.

In December, his father, Tory Lowe, learned his son had lead poisoning, as do 8.6 percent of the children in Milwaukee, according to a 2014 report by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

Even before then, Lowe had been working to inform his community on Milwaukee’s north side about the dangers of lead in the water. Lowe also uses his Facebook page to blast messages about shootings, kidnappings and carjackings to his more than 38,000 followers. He also made a music video called “Don’t Drink the Water” in which he raps about the city’s lead service lines.

“If the people most affected don’t know, it doesn’t matter,” Lowe said.

His son’s lead test result of 5.9 micrograms per deciliter is lower than many children in Milwaukee, Lowe said, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says researchers have not defined the effect lower levels might on the central nervous system and cannot rule out adverse effects at low levels. Any level above 5 micrograms is considered lead poisoning.

As part of the line replacement plan, the city published lists of every property known to have lead service lines. The Lowe family’s home was listed. He said his family does not drink from the tap, opting to buy bottled water instead.

“I know there’s thousands of kids being lead poisoned ... if my son can get lead poisoning and we don’t even drink the water,” Lowe said.

Milwaukee recently began an effort to replace the lead lines, starting with \$3.4 million to replace 300 that serve schools and day cares in 2017. Then, the city will spend another \$3.4 million to replace 300 lines serving residences.

At that pace, it would it would take more than 233 years to replace all of Milwaukee’s residential lead lines. To replace all 70,000 lead lines in the next 50 years, the city would need replace 1,400 pipes per year, which would cost about \$4.5 million each year, according to the Water Quality Task Force.

Robert Miranda, a representative for the Freshwater for Life Action Coalition, a water advocacy group, said there may be as many as 20,000 more lead service lines the city did not include in its original estimate. An April 2017 report by Milwaukee’s Water Quality Task Force backs up Miranda’s claim, noting that there is a “measure of uncertainty” because the number of lead lines installed from 1951 to 1962 “remains in limbo.”

“What we don’t know is how many more pipes we have from 1952 to 1962,” Miranda said. “They didn’t have anything that really substantiated or made that date concrete.”

The Milwaukee Department of Public Works declined an interview request from News21, but an email from department spokeswoman Sandy Rusch Walton said: “The (Milwaukee) Water Works complies with all state and federal drinking water standards, and is known for its extensive water quality monitoring program that reaches beyond basic requirements.”

8/21/2017

Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

Anna Smith lived with her children in a decrepit apartment where rain and snow fell through a hole in the ceiling and plastic grocery bags plugged a crack in the wall. It is one of many on the list of buildings with lead service lines.

Her 3-year-old daughter, Laila, tested at 8.8 micrograms per deciliter in October. Her other child, 1-year-old Princeton, tested with 12.1 in July.

"I wouldn't have stayed there if I knew they had lead poisoning," Smith said, adding that her daughter "was drinking from the faucet and stuff. I was cooking with the water."

Short-term lead exposure can cause symptoms such as headaches, constipation and abdominal pain, according to the CDC. Long-term exposure can lead to more serious neurological issues. It often affects children more than adults.

In East Chicago, Indiana, residents have filed an emergency action petition with the EPA, asking the agency to address lead service lines affecting water. In the northwest Indiana city known historically for its lead and steel production, as many as 90 percent of the homes could be connected to lead service lines, according to the petition to the EPA. In one neighborhood, 40 percent of the homes tested by the EPA for the Drinking Water Pilot Study exceeded federal action levels, meaning enough lead was in tap water to pose a risk.

The Calumet neighborhood's water problem was discovered as the EPA was investigating a separate issue – lead and arsenic in the soil left behind by the USS Lead Superfund Site – where the low-income neighborhood now sits. According to the EPA, it's not possible for lead to leach into the pipes, but many of the homes' water tested positive, which indicates lead service lines.

The NAACP's Patterson said communities of color – both urban and rural – are disproportionately affected by polluting industries because they are more likely to be located near low-income neighborhoods.

"There's an interesting mix of things. One, the pollution that comes externally from power plants or those types of things are disproportionately located in communities of color," she said. "Then, because those types of facilities are often underregulated and monitored, you have this situation where ... all of these things can end up affecting the water supply."

Akeesha Daniels spent 13 years in the West Calumet Housing Complex, a now-abandoned housing project where the lead refinery once stood. She said the residents were never warned about the lead in the soil or the pipes.

"We were never told," Daniels said. "Not one thing. Why would you let your most vulnerable people live there and not notify us that something was wrong?"

Calumet Lives Matter, a local advocacy group, is distributing cases of water to residents out of churches each week. Sherry Hunter, an organizer of the group, said each family gets four cases of water, some of which are donated by the nearby cities of Hammond and Gary.

The petition, signed by several community groups, says the city's water is unsafe to drink, even with the measures in place to control corrosion of the lead pipes. State Sen. Lonnie Randolph, whose district includes East Chicago, said the state is working to determine the extent of the water contamination issue and how much it will cost to fix it.

"We are fed up with the assault of toxic contamination on our city, our neighborhoods and our people," said the Rev. Cheryl Rivera, one of the leaders with the Community Strategy Group, another

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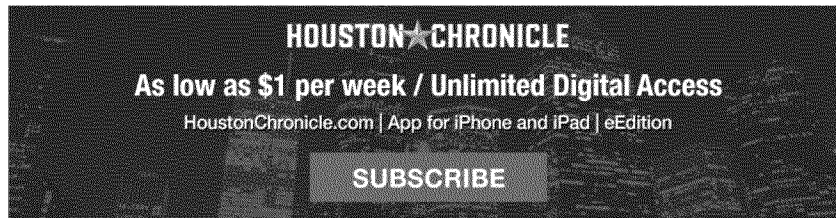
Crumbling pipes, tainted water plague black communities

organization that pushed for the petition. "Take it to somebody else's neighborhood. It is absolutely environmental racism. We are tired of our children and our families being poisoned intentionally."

Source URL (modified on 08/21/2017 - 05:02): <https://www.publicintegrity.org/2017/08/21/21114/crumbling-pipes-tainted-water-plague-black-communities>

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High Plains vineyard growers at odds with cotton farmers

Growers blame chemicals used by cotton farmers, who say claims overblown

By Bill Lambrecht, San Antonio Express-News | August 20, 2017 | Updated: August 21, 2017 11:13am

8/21/2017

High Plains vineyard growers at odds with cotton farmers - Houston Chronicle



Photo: Bob Owen, Staff

IMAGE 1 OF 28

Santos Jimenez, a 79-year-old migrant worker, moves his work bucket as he ties up loose branches on grape vines before mechanical harvesting at the Newsom Vineyards near Plains.

8/21/2017

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BROWNFIELD - At Lost Draw Vineyards in the High Plains, chemical herbicide that drifted from a cotton field in July has left a patch of merlot grapes ailing, its leaves deformed and the fruit starting to shrivel.

Dusty Timmons is directing a rescue operation in the family-owned plot, tripling irrigation and doubling fertilizer. But he worries that the grapes won't contain the necessary sugar that Kuhlman Cellars in Fredericksburg needs for the red wine. He may need to snip off the clusters and let the grapes rot on the ground, he said.

"I can't go into a vineyard in the High Plains and not see herbicide damage," said Timmons, president of the Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association, whose company also operates Lost Draw Cellars in Fredericksburg. He later corrected himself to say he'd recently seen one West Texas vineyard unaffected.

"It's hard enough worrying about God striking you down with hail. Now you have to worry about your neighbor striking you down with herbicide," he said.

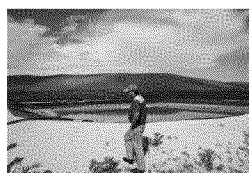
High Plains growers, who produce more than 80 percent of Texas's wine grapes, say they are increasingly plagued by the potent new formulations of herbicides cotton-growers deploy in their battle against weeds.

The problem has spread across many states, triggering lawsuits in Texas and elsewhere and creating conflict among neighbors. Texas grape growers have gotten little help from the state Agriculture Department and Legislature, where a bill to further restrict herbicide spraying this year failed to get a sponsor.

Cotton farmers respond that the wine industry claims are overblown and that high-tech growers in the nation's most productive cotton patch deploy caution in their unrelenting battle against weeds.

The extent of damage is hard to pin down in part because some vineyards are reluctant to acknowledge a problem. But Timmons, whose members include 250 vineyards and

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175 wineries, estimates that over 2,000 acres of wine grapes in Texas have seen at least some herbicide damage this year - roughly a quarter of the nearly 8,000 acres he says were planted.

He estimated his family's losses from herbicide damage at as much \$60,000 this season and overall losses in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for growers in Terry County, 550 miles northwest of Houston and known as the grape capital of Texas. He's not sure yet if the damage is sufficient enough to qualify for payments under his crop-insurance policy.

"We've seen herbicide drift in the past, but never as bad as this year," he said.

Since the arrival of genetically modified cotton two decades ago, farmers in Texas and elsewhere relied on glyphosate - better known as Monsanto Co.'s branded Roundup - to deal with the weeds and grasses that compete with crops.

But evolution interceded and the most stubborn of the weeds developed resistance. The failure forced a return to herbicides from the mid-20th century, dicamba and 2,4-D, approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in January for use with genetically modified crops.

In Texas - with 5.6 million acres and last year the nation's leading cotton state - the industry contends that only a tiny fraction of growers cause problems. The rest, they say, use approved spray nozzles and follow labels

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warning against spraying when its wet, windy (over 10 mph) or hotter than 90 degrees.

The Texas Department of Agriculture also plays down the threat, saying it has received minimal complaints about drift since last year - 15 alleging damage from 2,4-D and 11 related to dicamba.

A growing problem

Nonetheless, Texas is on the edge of a national problem, with damage from the potent weed-killers mounting and no new herbicides in the pipeline. A survey of state agriculture departments published last week at the University of Missouri reported 3.1 million acres of dicamba drift injury to soybeans this season in 20 states.

Researchers said Texas - where 160,000 acres of soybeans is viewed as a minor crop - didn't respond to the survey.

The story unfolding is one of industrial farming perils and conflict between neighbors that has triggered lawsuits, threats and even murder on a rural Arkansas road.

Arkansas took the extraordinary step this season of banning the sale and use dicamba amid reports that it was rising from fields as a gas and spreading over distant croplands. Missouri and Tennessee imposed strict new rules for application.

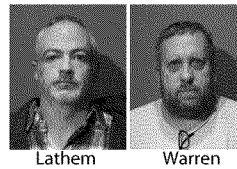
In Texas, robust expansion in the wine industry compounds the fear. The number of wineries has exploded from 40 in 2001 to 400 this year, according to the Texas Wine Marketing Research Institute at Texas Tech University.

"It's incredible growth and not something we expect to see changing any time soon," said the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission's Chris Porter.

High Plains growers, who supply more than 50 percent of the Hill Country market, say they often can't pinpoint the source of damage with so much herbicide used. Cotton-growers say lack of humidity in West Texas limits chemical volatility. Vineyard operators don't believe it.

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"It's the guy on the horizon that you have to worry about," remarked Neal Newsom, who grows grapes on 150 acres near Plains.

In muddy fields this month, Newsom, 62, whose family operates the Newsom Vineyards tasting room in Comfort, showed stretches of cupped and mottled leaves on several of his 12 grape varieties. The chemicals cause his vines to mimic drought, he says.

"Everything gets stunted and the leaves become nothing but veins," he said. "You can't find anything around here that's not been zapped."

The problem has generated suspicion and hostility between neighbors. Newsom said he has been told more than once "you need to move to town and stop watching everybody."

'Neighbors are angry'

Jet Wilmeth, who grows 200 acres of grapes along with 1,250 acres of cotton, said that the Texas Department of Agriculture is investigating the damages he displayed in his Diamante Doble Vineyard, near Tokio.

"Now my neighbors are angry at me," he said. "This whole situation has caused neighbors to not be good neighbors. And I don't like it."

By most accounts, Texas has avoided the rancorous disputes elsewhere. Monsanto and German-based BASF are defending multiple lawsuits contending that they put dicamba tolerant cotton on the market last year before newer, less drift-prone formulations won EPA approval. Many growers committed to the GMO, herbicide-tolerant seeds sprayed early vintage dicamba nonetheless.

Scott Partridge, Monsanto's vice president for global strategy, said: "It wasn't our product. We're being sued for damage that was allegedly caused by another manufacturer, and that's not something we're responsible for."

Monsanto's cotton seeds are dominant in West Texas and the company is building a \$150 million cotton processing plant at Lubbock. Partridge said Monsanto had reduced volatility in the dicamba herbicide it sells by 90 percent and is counseling growers on precautions. But in some

8/21/2017

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places the company is seeing mistakes, from wrong nozzles to contaminated equipment to sprayers driven too fast.

"We're trying to understand what has happened in the field," he said.

In the Texas Legislature this spring, proposed legislation would have enabled counties to more easily impose cutoff dates for spraying. But the bill couldn't even draw a sponsor after cotton-growers and chemical retailers objected, said wine industry lobbyist Kyle Frazier.

The Texas Department of Agriculture, which oversees pesticide use in the state, exempted the new chemical formulations from rules applied to other herbicides with restricted use. A spokesman said the aim was to reduce cotton-growers' paperwork.

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Business

http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/farmers-confused-by-monsanto-weedkiller-s-complex-instructions/article_8565e99d-c74e-5f8b-8f17-d7312c37329d.html

Farmers confused by Monsanto weedkiller's complex instructions

By Tom Polansek and Karl Plume Reuters 2 hrs ago



John Weiss looks over his crop of soybeans, which he had reported to the state board for showing signs of damage due to the drifting of Monsanto's pesticide Dicamba, at his farm in Dell, Arkansas, U.S. July 25, 2017. REUTERS/Karen Pulfer Focht/File Photo

CHICAGO • With Monsanto Co.'s latest flagship weedkiller, dicamba, banned in Arkansas and under review by U.S. regulators over concerns it can drift in the wind, farmers and weed scientists are also complaining that confusing directions on the label make the product hard to use safely.

Dicamba, sold under different brand names by BASF and DuPont, can vaporize under certain conditions and the wind can blow it into nearby crops and other plants. The herbicide can damage or even kill crops that have not been genetically engineered to resist it.

To prevent that from happening, Monsanto created a 4,550-word label with detailed instructions. Its complexity is now being cited by farmers and critics of the product. It was even singled out in a lawsuit as evidence that Monsanto's product may be virtually impossible to use properly.

At stake for Monsanto is the fate of Xtend soybeans, its largest ever biotech seed launch.

8/21/2017

Farmers confused by Monsanto weedkiller's complex instructions | Business | stltoday.com

Monsanto's label, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reviewed and approved, instructs farmers to apply the company's XtendiMax with VaporGrip on its latest genetically engineered soybeans only when winds are blowing at least 3 miles per hour, but not more than 15 mph.

Growers must also spray it from no higher than 24 inches above the crops. They must adjust spraying equipment to produce larger droplets of the herbicide when temperatures creep above 91 degrees Fahrenheit. After using the product, they must rinse out spraying equipment. Three times.

"The restriction on these labels is unlike anything that's ever been seen before," said Bob Hartzler, an agronomy professor and weed specialist at Iowa State University.

The label instructions are also of interest to lawyers for farmers suing Monsanto, BASF and DuPont over damage they attribute to the potent weedkiller moving off-target to nearby plants.

A civil lawsuit led against the companies in federal court in St. Louis last month alleged it might be impossible to properly follow the label. Restrictions on wind speed, for example, do not allow for timely sprayings over the top of growing soybeans, according to the complaint.

The companies failed "to inform the EPA that their label instructions were unrealistic," the lawsuit said.

Monsanto said that while its label is detailed, it is not difficult to follow.

"It uses very simple words and terms," Scott Partridge, Monsanto's vice president of strategy, told Reuters. "They are not complex in a fashion that inhibits the ability of making a correct application."

BASF and DuPont could not immediately be reached for comment on the lawsuit on Friday.

Monsanto and BASF have said they trained thousands of farmers to properly use dicamba. Monsanto also said the crop damage seen this summer likely stemmed largely from farmers who did not follow label instructions.

Those detailed instructions led some growers and professional spraying companies to avoid the herbicide altogether.

Richard Wilkins, a Delaware farmer, abandoned plans to plant Monsanto's dicamba-resistant soybeans, called Xtend, this year because a local company would not spray the weedkiller.

"The clean-out procedure that you have to go through to ensure that you don't have any residue remaining in the applicator equipment is quite onerous," he said.

In Missouri, farm cooperative MFA Inc. said it stopped spraying dicamba for customers last month partly because high temperatures made it too difficult to follow the label.

Studying wind, temperatures

The EPA is reviewing label instructions following the reports of crop damage.

Monsanto has a lot riding on the EPA review. The company's net sales increased 1 percent to \$4.2 billion in the quarter ended on May 31 from a year ago, partly due to higher U.S. sales of Xtend soybeans. Since January, the company has increased its estimate for 2017 U.S. plantings to 20 million acres from 15 million.

One confusing requirement on its dicamba label, farmers said, prohibits spraying during a "temperature inversion," a time when a stable atmosphere can increase the potential for the chemical to move to fields that are vulnerable.

To follow the rule, some growers used their smart phones to check weather websites for wind speeds and information on inversions.

"You have to be a meteorologist to get it exactly right," said Hunter Ramey, a Missouri farmer who believes dicamba damaged soybeans on his farm that could not resist the chemical.

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/San-Antonio-staring-at-ozone-violation-11943261.php>

San Antonio staring at ozone violation

Express-News Editorial Board Published 4:50 pm, Friday, August 18, 2017



The downtown San Antonio skyline looks hazy from Eisenhower Park on Oct. 2, 2016, the day of a late-season spike in ozone levels. Officially, the city's levels have been below unsafe levels. In reality, not so much.

San Antonio is the largest city in Texas, and one of the largest in the country, to meet federal ozone standards.

But the dirty truth about air quality in San Antonio is that ozone levels, while trending down, have been above federal standards.

Just not officially.

That may change soon.

The EPA has said it will make decisions by Oct. 1 about whether cities are in compliance with 2015 ozone limits. This is a reversal, of sorts, for the EPA. Several months ago, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt had recommended delaying enforcement of that standard for another year.

A nonattainment designation would be an economic hit. It would create obstacles for federal transportation funding, business expansion and delivery of air quality permits. But this is something the San Antonio region has been expecting for some time.

San Antonio's ozone levels have been above the 2015 federal standard of 70 parts per billion. And as the Express-News' Brendan Gibbons has reported, ozone levels here lead to 52 preventable deaths per year, according to the American Thoracic Institute.

There is potential wiggle room in the EPA's about-face on ozone standard enforcement. Pruitt could extend the timeline to make a designation.

Such uncertainty only underscores the importance for local officials to continue clean air policies to reduce ozone levels. These include continued air quality

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San Antonio staring at ozone violation - San Antonio Express-News

monitoring, anti-idling ordinances, education and outreach, and CPS Energy's plans to shutter its J.T. Deely coal-fired plant.

The primary goal is cleaner air, but the region has to be prepared for a nonattainment designation. The city and region needs to keep moving forward to reduce ozone levels.

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H E A R S T

Driller interest is tepid in Gulf-wide oil and gas lease sale

Comment

Updated on August 17, 2017 at 10:58 AM

Posted on August 17, 2017 at 10:55 AM



water drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. (U.S. Coast
| photo/Petty Officer 3rd Class Barry Bena)

By The Associated Press

Oil and gas companies offered \$121.1 million in high bids on 90 Gulf of Mexico tracts at a federal lease sale.

The sale on Wednesday (Aug. 17) was the first since 1983 to offer every available tract in the Gulf.

Companies bid on far fewer tracts than in March, when only those off Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama were offered. That's generally seen as the best part of the Gulf for drilling.

In March, 28 oil companies offered \$274.8 million in high bids on 163 tracts. The government rejected 10 bids as too low, accepting \$264 million in bids.

The U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management says 27 companies submitted 99 bids Wednesday. Nine tracts got two bids each.

8/21/2017

Driller interest is tepid in Gulf-wide oil and gas lease sale | NOLA.com

Forty-two of the tracts are at least nearly a mile under water.

The tepid response to Wednesday's lease can be attributed to stagnant energy prices. Oil has stayed between \$40 to \$50 a barrel for the past 52 weeks -- far below the threshold most exploration firms consider profitable.

Natural gas prices have plummeted since a resurgence in inland U.S. drilling has added to an existing glut on the market. Much of this activity is driven by the promise and interest of foreign markets in exports of liquified natural gas from America.

President Donald Trump campaigned on a promise to open up more areas for energy exploration, although the process to make more of the Gulf of Mexico available to drillers started under his predecessor Barack Obama.

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/politics/article_6ccbb582-8431-11e7-9698-636e746ea0ab.html

Louisiana seeks to expand flood recovery programs for homeowners

BY ELIZABETH CRISP | ECRISP@THEADVOCATE.COM PUBLISHED AUG 18, 2017 AT 11:22 AM | UPDATED AUG 19, 2017 AT 11:09 AM



Aerials of severe weather flooding in East Baton Rouge Parish on Monday August 15, 2016. A National Guard vehicle turns west on Prescott Avenue off of N. Foster Drive. Looking south southeast.

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Advocate file photo BILL FIEG

Elizabeth Crisp

As the state works to ramp up its flood recovery programs, some homeowners still seeking assistance a year after the historic floods told a panel tasked with overseeing efforts that they are growing frustrated with the process.

One by one, more than a dozen homeowners told the Restore Louisiana Task Force on Friday of inspection mix ups, delayed communications, confusion over qualifications and other issues.

Members of the task force diligently took notes and vowed to help work out the kinks in the process. Officials from Gov. John Bel Edwards' administration followed up one-on-one with people in the crowd.

Story Continued Below

"This will never be fast enough for any of us," said Pat Forbes, director of the Office of Community Development.

The Restore Louisiana Task Force's meeting Friday took place in Denham Springs – one of the areas hardest hit by the August downpour. Officials estimate that nearly half of the Denham Springs area homeowners who had FEMA-verified loss in the flood haven't yet taken the initial step of filling out an introductory survey to get into the pipeline for assistance, about 7,500 households.

Statewide, about 41,000 of the more than 90,000 homeowners who have losses verified by FEMA have filled out the survey at restore.la.gov.

The task force on Friday agreed to ask for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's approval to open up the homeowner recovery program to those who had flood insurance who were previously excluded. They expect it could impact some 12,000 homeowners, who will be notified if they have taken the survey.

Forbes said HUD's approval should be granted quickly.

The state is also seeking approval to increase the size of reimbursement grants for homeowners at higher income levels.

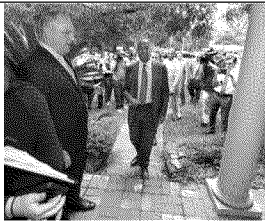
The state has received about \$1.7 billion from the federal government to aid the flood recovery – the bulk of which will go toward homeowner rebuilding. Those who qualify can get reimbursements for work already done or money to make repairs that still need to be made. About \$16 million has been allocated through the program so far.

Forbes said the state has decided to expand the program's eligibility because average award costs have been below original estimates and the number of people applying has been lower than expected.

The state has continued to struggle with getting people to take the initial step toward applying for funds.

Livingston Parish President Layton Ricks said one of the biggest hurdles is general pessimism.

"Across the board, every statement is the same, 'Why, when we know we won't get anything?'" he said. "That sentiment has spread to just about every homeowner in the parish."



Gov. John Bel Edwards, HUD Secretary Ben Carson continue flood recovery talks

Comments from the public carried that sentiment on Friday.

Robin Williams, who lives in the Forest Ridge subdivision, told the panel that she took the survey as soon as it opened in April. In June, she was invited to take the next step: A formal application. A program issue with one inspector prompted the need for a second inspection, which took place last month.

She's been stuck in the "inspection period" since July 1 and doesn't know when that will change.

"No one can really tell me how long it takes," said Williams, a single parent. "I feel like none of the departments really know what is going on in the other departments."

She said she has been trying to work on her house on her own over the past year.

"I've depleted every cent I had," she said. "I've not paid credit card bills and mortgage bills, just to get my house livable so we have a place to go. The pipe is taking so long to get through this, I may not have a house to keep."

Others told similar stories of waiting for inspections or feeling like they were not being adequately updated about their status.

Jimmy Durbin, the former Denham Springs mayor who is co-chairing the Restore Louisiana Task Force, said he hears that a lot.

"I have heard this from people who have not heard back," he said.



A year into Baton Rouge flood recovery, how much more federal aid can Louisiana expect?

The Restore Louisiana Homeowner Program is still early in its implementation. About \$16 million has been distributed to date, as the program continues to be rolled out in phases.

"We are not declaring victory," said Erin Monroe Wesley, special counsel to the governor. "We are not satisfied."

State leaders have repeatedly expressed concern over the homeowners who received Small Business Administration, who can only get grants if they don't duplicate their loan amounts. Changing that would require action from the federal government. If that were to happen, Forbes said that the state expects thousands more would sign up for assistance.

Expanding the programs to those who had flood insurance, an effort of which Edwards has been a vocal supporter, means that people who were under-insured – whose insurance didn't entirely cover the rebuilding – can now seek aid from the state for the additional costs.

Paul Matherne, one of the residents who addressed the task force Friday, said he was initially rejected for the program because he had flood insurance, but his insurance wasn't enough to cover everything.

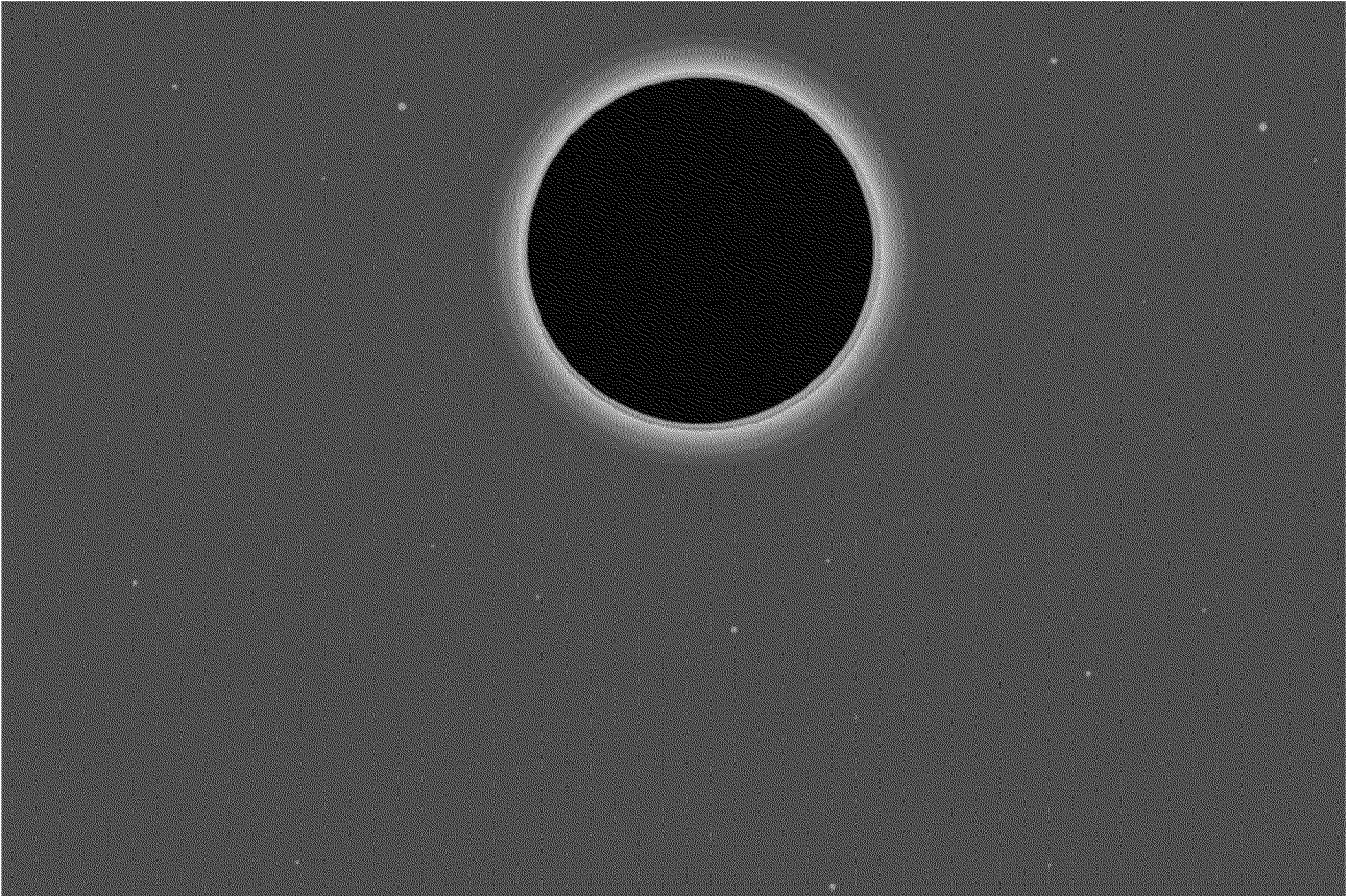
"We did a whole lot with the little bit we had from insurance. We're almost there," he said. "We're not looking for a hand out – just a hand up."

8/21/2017

What Happens to Solar Power in an Eclipse? We'll Find Out Monday - The New York Times

What Happens to Solar Power in an Eclipse? We'll Find Out Monday

By BRAD PLUMER AUG. 18, 2017



Claire O'Neill/The New York Times

Unlike most eclipse-watchers in the United States, Eric Schmitt wouldn't mind seeing a few clouds in the sky when the moon starts blotting out the sun on Monday.

"A cloudy morning might even be helpful for us," he said.

That's because, as the vice president for operations at the California Independent System Operator, which oversees the state's electric grid, Mr.

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What Happens to Solar Power in an Eclipse? We'll Find Out Monday - The New York Times

Schmitt will be dealing with an unusual challenge. As the eclipse carves a long shadow over California on Monday morning, it is expected to knock offline more than 5,600 megawatts' worth of solar panels at its peak — a big chunk of the 19,000 megawatts of solar power that currently provide one-tenth of the state's electricity. The California I.S.O. plans to fill the void by ramping up natural gas and hydroelectric power plants.

Then, a few minutes later, when the eclipse passes, all those solar panels will come roaring back to life, and grid operators will have to quickly make room for the sharp rise in generation by scaling back gas and hydropower. A cloudy day, Mr. Schmitt explained, might help blunt those wild swings in solar energy.

For months, the nation's grid overseers have been preparing for any disruptions in solar power that the eclipse might cause, by running models and training operators in simulators for worst cases. Because solar still provides less than 1 percent of electricity nationwide, regulators are confident that the lights will stay on, other energy sources will compensate and the costs will be minimal.

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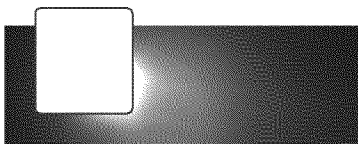
But many operators also see the event as a rare trial run for a future in which solar power will become far more prevalent — and they will have to accommodate a fast-growing source of energy that, unlike older coal or nuclear plants, can wax and wane considerably during the day, and drop off at night.

“An eclipse is obviously not something we see every day, but this is going to be a good exercise for us,” said Randy Wheelless, a spokesman for Duke

Energy, which expects solar capacity in North Carolina to dip from 2,500 megawatts to just 200 on Monday afternoon, affecting roughly 3 percent of electricity generation in the state. “There’s no doubt more solar power is going to come onto the grid in the future, and that does increase the challenge of balancing the grid even on days when there’s not an eclipse.”

Nowhere is this challenge more stark than in California, home to nearly half the nation’s photovoltaic panels. The California I.S.O. already has to handle a steep ramp-up of solar power every morning and a similarly steep ramp-down every evening. Because it can be difficult and costly to quickly switch gas turbines on and off to compensate, the state is getting creative in juggling its fast-growing solar load.

Some of its tactics will be put to the test on Monday. For example, California has agreements with Arizona, Nevada and Oregon to transfer small amounts of electricity between states to balance out fluctuations. The state may need to call on this “energy imbalance market” during the eclipse, Mr. Schmitt said.



Guide: How to Watch a Solar Eclipse

In the future, as California plans to increase its share of renewable energy to address climate change, such interstate transfers may prove even more crucial. The idea is that a cloudy day or a thunderstorm (or an eclipse) may knock out solar panels in a few areas, but it is unlikely

to knock out solar panels and wind turbines all across the West at once. Spreading out renewable energy across a larger geographical area could help mitigate interruptions.

Creating a fully regional energy market would require further negotiations between states, but Mr. Schmitt sees the eclipse as a way to “dip our toes in the water and see what that looks like.”

California also makes heavy use of pumped hydroelectric storage, in which surplus electricity during the day is used to pump water up a hill. The water can later be released downhill to power a turbine that generates electricity in periods of high demand. The eclipse will help the California I.S.O. test whether its electricity markets are properly set up to call on enough pumped hydropower if needed.

The stakes are high: Some skeptics of renewable energy have questioned whether increasing shares of wind and solar might make the grid less reliable, and the Department of Energy is studying the question. But independent researchers have argued that the nation's grid can accommodate much larger shares of wind and solar than today's levels and still withstand fluctuations in the weather. A steady response to the eclipse could bolster those arguments.

MORE REPORTING ON ECLIPSES

Elsewhere in the country, grid operators are hoping the eclipse will help them learn more about how solar power behaves during disruptions, which will allow them to improve forecasting tools that they use to prepare for cloudy days or storms.

For instance, PJM Interconnection oversees the regional power grid that serves 65 million people in the Mid-Atlantic. While solar power still provides less than 1 percent of its supply, PJM is trying to get a handle on the growing number of rooftop solar panels that sit behind home meters, largely hidden to grid operators. In essence, they have to estimate how much rooftop solar power is out there and how it affects daily loads, and the eclipse offers a way to test those estimates.

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What Happens to Solar Power in an Eclipse? We'll Find Out Monday - The New York Times

“I’m actually hoping for a bright, sunny day,” said Ken Seiler, PJM’s executive director of systems operations. A sharp fall and subsequent rise in solar activity “will really help us validate our models,” he said. (For now, PJM expects to lose up to 2,000 megawatts of rooftop solar power during the eclipse.)

Meanwhile, the Electric Power Research Institute, a nonprofit group that performs research for the nation’s electric utilities, will monitor solar farms across the country to see how they respond to the eclipse. Ben York, a senior project engineer at the institute, said the data may prove useful in fine-tuning technologies like solar tracking systems, which allow panels to tilt during the day to maximize sunlight exposure.

Grid operators are already casting an eye toward the next eclipse. While such events may seem rare, a total solar eclipse occurs somewhere in the world roughly every two years. Europe’s grid operators dealt with a total eclipse in 2015 — an event that American operators have studied thoroughly. And another total solar eclipse will carve a swath through the Eastern United States in 2024.

“We’re expecting solar power to be a much bigger part of our footprint by 2024,” said Mr. Seiler of PJM. “And we want to be ready.”